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# RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by Pax Christi International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[5 April 1997]

1. Children are among the most vulnerable group of people. Thus, their rights have to be protected. The international instruments describing or referring to children's rights are numerous. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines the right to life in article 3. However, the most important document dealing with children's rights is the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Pax Christi supports the idea that children need an instrument for the protection of their rights, because they are often victims of abuses or violations of human rights.

2. Children require security and protection of their human rights because they are vulnerable and influenceable, but also because they are entitled to a normal development and childhood, as described in articles 6 and 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

3. Children involved in armed conflicts are among the most targeted group, since they are directly confronted with war and its effects. Indeed, they live a psychological, physical and social long-lasting trauma, in contradiction to the principles of article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this context, Ms. Graça Machel's report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306), indicates various aspects that require consideration when dealing with children in armed conflict. We strongly support the expert's recommendations: education and training are essential to achieve peace.

"War violates every right of the child - the right to life, the right to grow up in a family environment, the right to health, the right to survival and full development and the right to be nurtured and protected, among others. The injury to children - the physical wounds, the psychological distress, the sexual violence - is an affront to every humanitarian impulse that inspired the Convention on the Rights of the Child." (Ms. Machel in her address to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-third session).

4. UNICEF, in its anti-war agenda, also encourages the demobilization of child soliders as well as their rehabilitation and surveillance so as to prevent them from becoming violent and to heal the psychological wounds left by war. Child soldiers may also feel "powerful" when enthrusted with arms and responsibilities. We cannot tolerate that children, often under the age of 18, are involved in conflicts and, thereby, deprived of their right to development, their right to education and their right to life. We equally acknowledge that the recruitment of children into the armed forces must not become a usual practice and wish to express our support for the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the involvement and recruitment of children in armed conflict.

5. Moreover, many children suffer grave abuses of physical integrity. This is particularly the case for girls: they may be counted upon for support to their families and be induced into sexual exploitation or into performing practices affecting their health.

6. Landmines clearly violate the right to life of children, as described in article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children are unfortunately the main victims of anti-personnel landmines: they are the ones who play in areas that may be infested by mines. Not only do landmines maim innocent children (and long after the end of the conflict), but refugee and internally displaced children are particularly vulnerable to mines. They are not familiar with the areas where mines are laid. In Afghanistan and Angola, children are potential victims of landmines: thàt must stop. In Afghanistan, there are still 10 million mines, one mine for every two Afghans. Every day, 10 Afghans die because of mines, many of them children. In Angola, approximately 10 million mines lie in the ground. The cruelty of these weapons and the horrible consequences they generate are undeniable. We urge the Commission, along with other United Nations bodies, to encourage the signature of an international instrument prohibiting the manufacture, stockpiling, transfer and sale of landmines. We welcome the resolutions adopted by the Sub-Commission at its last two sessions calling for a total ban on the use, production, trade and stockpiling of landmines, and strongly urge the Commission to adopt a similar text. In this context, we express our support for the Ottawa process and we are looking forward to its achievements.

7. Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child describes the rights of the child to protection from "economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development". UNICEF has defined exploitive child labour according to the following criteria: full time or too many hours when the child is too young; work involving physical or psychological constraints;

work inducing life on the streets and providing too low wages; work affecting the dignity and self-respect of the child (such as slavery and sexual exploitation); and work impeding the social and/or psychological development of the child. In addition, UNICEF has described the negative effects of work on the child's physical, cognitive, psychological and social/moral development.

8. Furthermore, the International Labour Organization, in cooperation with UNICEF and other United Nations agencies, has launched the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). According to the ILO, there are more than 73 million children between the ages of 10 and 14 who are economically active; the highest levels of economically active children are in Bhutan, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nepal and Uganda. We wish to express our support for IPEC and for the ILO's continued efforts to eliminate child labour, with an emphasis on the most hazardous forms of child exploitation. We believe that education is part of the solution. We invite the Commission to consider the issues at stake.

9. We trust that the Commission will pursue its thorough study of the issues mentioned and we hope that the States Members of the United Nations that have not done so will sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and incorporate its principles in their national policies and legislation.

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